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ABSTRACT

This booklet is intended for elementary and secondary teachers and administrators interested in participating in a Poets in the Schools program. The first section explains Poets in the Schools and its objectives and answers questions about it. The second section includes responses to the program from students and teachers. The third section lists resources for obtaining more information about the program. The fourth section offers practical hints for planning a poet's residency in a school. The final section contains an annotated list of resources for Poets in the Schools programs and an annotated list of anthologies of contemporary poetry. (TS)

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POETS IN THE SCHOOLS: A HANDBOOK

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Committee on Poets in the Schools

CS 202 540

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH
1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801

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I. A DIALOGUE ABOUT POETS IN THE SCHOOLS

Poets are teaching poetry and many people connected with schools are interested in how they teach and how one brings them into the classroom. Any member of the NCTE Committee on Poets in the Schools might respond to these questions, and others, in the following way.

I'm thinking of having a poet come to my school!
Good. Since 1966, if one can judge by reports from state arts councils and local associations throughout the U.S., the experience of having a poet in the school—either elementary or secondary—has been very positive for students, teachers, and poets.

But can't you be more specific? Remember, I've never done this kind of thing before.
Sure, and this booklet offers some suggestions. Remember, though, that the success of Poets in the Schools over the years—its growth from a pilot program to a national movement, from five to fifty states—has been partly a result of its flexibility. Each area does it a bit differently. As in all teaching environments, there is no "master plan" that works every time, but we have learned a few things about preparing the way and evaluating the experience that may be useful to you.

What happens when a poet comes to my school?
What a poet does in a classroom depends, in part, on what you want to accomplish and on the way the program is organized in your state. Principally, poets conduct writing sessions with students. They also hold writing workshops with teachers and usually give readings as part of their residencies.

But what about the classroom noise? My students are pretty rowdy. Would they listen to a poet?
The problem is not noise, because the object is not "listening." The object of the program is rather to get the students actively involved in writing. This may mean moving around, talking with one another, listening not so much to the poet as to their fellow classmates. Poets don't expect students to be still, particularly if they are excited about what they're doing. Our experience with workshops for students from grades three to twelve and with poetry readings is that young people enjoy writing poetry and hearing it or reading it aloud, just as they enjoy hearing music played.

Tell me, what would a poet's residency in my school consist of?
Although the precise terms of the residencies vary, the poet is usually scheduled to meet with a particular group of students several times over a period of weeks. The poet has the students writing as soon as possible, and also reads and discusses the work of contemporary poets, including his or her own poems and those written by students. Much of the work with students takes place on a one-to-one basis, through discussions and conferences, and on an informal basis, through group readings and special sessions, in the library or homeroom.

How is the visiting poet different from a regular teacher?
Visiting poets are there as *artists*, as professionals who devote their time and energy to a particular craft, that is, to writing. Working in collaboration with teachers, poets provide a valuable service: to communicate through poetry their special view of the world, and to help students discover the poetry in themselves and enjoy the writing of others.

What can I do to make the most of the poet's visit?
Whether a poet is coming to your school for a few hours, a ten-week session, or a year's residency, try to make him or her available to the students and teachers. Be sure that the entire school knows the name of the poet and the residency dates. Avoid scheduling residencies that conflict with other major school activities, exam periods or holidays. To introduce the poet and his or her work to a new audience, post in the library or hallway a brief biographical sketch, a photograph, and a few remarks by the poet; pass out copies of two or three poems; carry articles and pictures in the student newspaper. And follow the suggestions in the last section under "Scheduling the Residency."

Who pays for the visiting poet? Our budget for speakers is almost nonexistent.
The poet's salary is usually paid through a program of supplemental or matching funds. In several Poets in the Schools programs, the school or school district pays a percentage, and the state arts council pays the rest. Check with the director of Artists in the Schools in your state for details on the financial arrangements in your area since they vary. Sometimes local private foundations and clubs will help. When all else fails, students have raised the money themselves, through bake sales or car washes.

What are some reasonable expectations?
To have students writing their own poems; to make students and

teachers more familiar with contemporary poetry and see that it is not all rhyme and meter; to bring schools in contact with working professionals, artists who live their craft and know how to teach it and share it with others. Poets in the schools bring a sense of immediacy to their workshops, suggesting to young people that poetry is one way of finding out who you are and what you feel and of finding words to say all that. Experimenting with feeling and language takes a long time, so no one is promising immediate "results" in the form of a poem. But our experience as teachers suggests (1) that there usually *are* immediate results in the form of students writing; and (2) that the exploration, with the help of poets, is valuable in itself.

II. STUDENTS AND TEACHERS RESPONDING TO POETS IN THE SCHOOLS

Student Evaluations and Excerpts from Letters

"The poetry lady is like somebody who spilled poetry all over herself."—Georgia 9 year-old

"I thought all poets were thin and wizened and had been visited by the grim reaper for breakfast (the grim reaper only had coffee black). But he dressed like any ordinary human being . . . and spoke like the rest of us. This impressed me."—Texas 17 year-old

"When my friends and I left we talked about [the poet] and all of us had felt his pain and his joy, which he came to let us do."—Massachusetts 14 year-old

"I saw how he loves his work and is devoted to it. That helped me think a lot about what I do, not only poetry."—Colorado 12 year-old

"It was the first time I had sat through one class of poetry, let alone three, without falling asleep. It was good poetry, not just 'the tree is green, the water is clean!' "—New York 13 year-old

"I was surprised when one of the football players admitted that he wrote poetry, too."—Massachusetts 13 year-old

"I liked the attitude the poet had toward us, making us all feel we were all friends and not in a speaker/student situation."—Texas 15 year-old

"I didn't know so many people wrote. I used to write, but I wouldn't show it to anybody. Since the poetry workshop, I have a lot of people to share my poems with."—Massachusetts 15 year-old

"At first I thought you were going to be like all the other great things we're supposed to have. But you were really good."—New York 12 year-old

"Even though I did not think that poets were faggots, I must confess that I believed they were abnormal. Not knowing how to read poetry, I could seldom get much emotion out of some poems; however, listening to you I caught emotions that might otherwise have escaped me."—Texas 16 year-old

"How do you get to be a poet? I mean I like poetry a lot, you know. Like I read lots of it and I, you know, write poems myself but they're never going anywhere. How do you do it?"—Rhode Island 17 year-old

Teacher Evaluations

"She gave us so much more than was ever expected or required. Teachers and students weren't the only ones that enjoyed her visit. A father visited and he wrote too!"—English teacher, Denver, Colorado

"It gave the students another way of expressing themselves. . . . The below average students did exceptionally well. All the students were pleased with what they learned."—Elementary teacher, Peabody, Massachusetts

"Our community is not arts oriented, and the students tend toward two questions: Are all poets weird? How much money do they make? Their questions have been dissolved by contact with a real person who is deeply involved in his creative life."—English teacher, Sanford, Maine

"[The poet] really un-strangered us, both to each other and to poetry."—English teacher, Bloomfield, Connecticut

"At first, when I heard poets were coming, I thought, oh dear, what are they going to do? After a while I was going down the hall calling in other teachers and saying, 'Come and look, come and see what they are doing.' The poets came in and then the children begin unlocking, bam, bam, bam."—Elementary teacher, Wind River Reservation, Wyoming

"The poet was able to relate sincerely with many of the students individually, encourage them to respond to their own feelings, and begin to develop the ability to translate these feelings into ideas, words, and phrases."—English teacher, Kennebunk, Maine

"A resounding success! The students loved it, so did I! The major

accomplishment lies in convincing students that books are written by people rather than machines. This means that they, too, can do it."—English teacher, Barre, Massachusetts

"I plan to team teach with the fifth grade literature teacher, incorporating many ideas that were presented by the poet. . . ."—Elementary teacher, Pittston, Maine

"All I've heard so far has been uniformly good. . . . This is one area in which traditional education has always been deficient, that is, in enabling people to develop precise communication—that which can best express subtlety of feeling—and I don't know anything which can better do this."—Member, Board of Education, Casper, Wyoming

"The success of the program and, to an equal degree, some of its failures combine to offer one of the most interesting stories in modern education."—Director, National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C.

III. BEGINNING AT THE BEGINNING: WHO TO ASK FOR HELP

It's easy. Give some thought to the kind of emphasis you want in your Poets in the Schools program. Talk with other interested teachers or community people. Then write or call the director of Artists in the Schools programs nearest you.

All fifty states have state arts councils and directors of Artists in the Schools who can put you in touch with poets, send brochures or booklets, and give you information about programs in your area. Supported by funds from state and federal governments, they are often located in the state capital. "Poets in the Schools," a handout listing addresses for all state arts councils and including student poems from ten states, is available from Director, Literature Section, National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C. 20506; telephone (202) 634-6044.

In addition to *A Directory of American Poets*, 1975 edition (see bibliography), the following sources may be helpful for your section of the United States:

Michael True
Worcester County Poetry Association, Inc.
44 West Street
Worcester, Massachusetts 01609
(617) 757-8228

Myra Klahr, Executive Director
New York State Poets in the Schools
125 King Street
Chappaqua, New York 10514
(914) 238-4481

Poetry in the Schools in Georgia
Georgia Council for the Arts
225 Peachtree Street, N.E.
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

Molly LaBerge
Community Programs in the Arts and Sciences
75 West 5th Street
St. Paul, Minnesota 55102
(612) 227-8241

Judith Wray, Director
Artists in the Schools
Colorado Council of the Arts and Humanities
1550 Lincoln Street
Denver, Colorado 80203
(303) 892-2617

And don't forget: you probably have poets and other writers in your own community who speak precisely and knowledgeably about their craft.

IV. WHAT WE'VE LEARNED: PLANNING YOUR PROGRAM

Poets have written extensively about their work in the schools. Most state arts councils provide a newsletter or reprints of articles by teacher-poets, such as those in the series "Poetry in the Classroom," *American Poetry Review*, 1973-present. Two other sources are the books by Kenneth Koch and Douglas Anderson listed in the bibliography.

In general, the poet attempts to help students become involved in the process of making a poem; to enable them to appreciate the close relationship between language and experience ("To hear the natural rhythm and music in the way we speak," as Judith Steinberg and Elizabeth McKim have said); and to create an environment that helps students gain access to the thoughts, memories, and feelings that are the source of poetry. These general goals may not be approached in the same way, but through apprenticeship training and experience

each poet will have developed a particular method of achieving them in the classroom.

By trial and error, by experimenting, evaluating, and re-examining, participants in Poets in the Schools programs have developed some general guidelines that may be useful to anyone setting up a program for the first time. Those given below are a composite of suggestions made by program directors in Colorado, New York, and Minnesota, and are used specifically by the Worcester County Poetry Association in Massachusetts. However, the purpose of this guide is to help you carry out the details of a residency, not to burden you with rules. Use what is most helpful to you, and remember that all suggestions can be adjusted to your needs and schedules.

A Summary of Some Previous Points

- The Poets in the Schools program places experienced, professional poets in schools, all grades.
- The poet conducts writing classes for students, as well as discussions and workshops with participating teachers, and sometimes gives public readings.
- The program is administered and partly funded by the state arts council through the director of Artists in the Schools.
- A contact person in each school is responsible for all in-school scheduling, and serves as liaison between the school, on the one hand, and the director of Artists in the Schools and the poet, on the other.

Scheduling the Residency

The specifics of scheduling a residency are mostly left to the contact teacher and the poet, but three items need special attention.

A meeting of the poet and as many teachers as possible should take place early in the program, preferably before it begins. During this get-together the purpose of the program should be explained to English teachers whether they will participate directly or not. It would be helpful if the poet could explain at that point the objective of his or her visit.

The poet will be at the school for specific periods to work with students (small groups, 20 or less, are best) on their writing, usually in a regular class. In many instances the poet will be available for private conferences with students and teachers, and, when possible, for teacher workshops and readings. It is important to remember that

the poet works in the school as a poet primarily, and does not arrive with complete lesson plans, curriculum ideas, and one-two-three how-to-do-it information. The poet is not a substitute teacher, in other words, but someone who works closely with the regular teacher, as another outside professional might.

One teacher in the school should be appointed as the contact person to serve as liaison between the school and the poet, and to help arrange and carry out the schedule. The contact's primary duties are:

- to introduce the poet to faculty and principal, and perhaps to describe the program to the school committee
- to set up an informal meeting between poet and teachers
- to give background information about the students the poet will be visiting and the cultural environment in which the poet will be working
- to collect and print student work from the poetry workshop, with the poet's help
- to gather comments on the program from students and teachers
- to help arrange a coffee hour or other gatherings that bring the poet and the teachers together during the residency.

Other activities that the school and the poet may wish to work out together:

- assignment of space for the poet's own use during the visit in the library or somewhere else convenient for talks with students
- readings for the poet, and for groups of students and teachers (but not necessarily a large assembly gathering)
- sessions with selected small groups of students who are especially interested in writing
- visits to other classes, such as art, industrial arts, painting, music, humanities, and the school newspaper staff
- distribution or display of the poet's publications
- news stories for the school and the local newspapers, as well as radio interviews
- an evaluation of the program afterwards by all people involved on forms provided by the sponsoring agency, in most cases, the state arts council.

Resources for Poets in the Schools Programs

A Directory of American Poets. Ed. Poets and Writers, Inc. New York: Poets and Writers, 1975. $6. A "nearly exhaustive, state-by-state list of poets interested in working in writing programs in schools." The most valuable single source for information on poets and resource materials (see "Service Section" of the Directory for an extensive list of such materials). *Coda*, a supplementary newsletter, is sent free to all Directory purchasers. Available from Poets and Writers, Inc., 201 W. 54th Street, New York, NY 10019; NCTE, Order Department, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801; and Publishing Center for Cultural Resources, 27 W. 53rd Street, New York, NY 10019.

American Poetry Review. $5 per year, six issues. A special column by poet-teachers, as well as poetry and criticism, make this periodical essential to any school library. Orders: Department S, 401 S. Broad Street, Philadelphia, PA 19147.

A Borrower Be. Ed. Ruby Lee Norris and Sally Harris Sange. Richmond, Va.: Humanities Center, 1975. $3.50. Includes section on how poets teach, giving many examples of the poems they use to stimulate student writing. Distributed by NCTE.

Homemade Poems: A Handbook. Daniel Lusk. Hermosa, S.D.: Lame Johnny Press, 1974. $2.50. A primer designed "to help people make their own poems at home, at school, in a field, park or recreation center."

My Sister Looks Like a Pear: Awakening the Poetry in Young People. Ed. Douglas Anderson. New York: Hart Publishing Co., 1974. $2.95. The author, a veteran poet in the schools, describes his experiences and activities with students from every grade level, and includes 250 samples of their writing.

Pass the Poetry, Please: Using Poetry in Pre-Kindergarten-Six Classrooms. Lee Bennett Hopkins. Scholastic Book Services, Citation Press, 1972. $2.65. Especially for elementary teachers, a host of ideas, with brief biographies of recommended poets and lists of materials by and for children.

Poemmaking: Poets in Classrooms. Ed. Harriet Feinberg and Ruth Whitman. Lawrence, Mass.: Massachusetts Council of Teachers of English, 1975. $3.50. Orders: MCTE, 205 Hampshire Street, Lawrence, MA 01841. Also distributed by NCTE.

Somebody Turned on a Tap in These Kids: Poetry and Young People Today. Ed. Nancy Larrick. New York: Dell Publishing Co., Delta Books, 1972. $2.45. A collection of useful "how to" essays by poets and teachers with experience in inner city schools.

Stone Soup: A Journal of Children's Literature. $2 single copy; $5 a year. A quarterly, with poems and drawings by very young students ages 3-12. Orders: Stone Soup, Inc., Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063.

Teachers and Writers Collaborative Newsletter. $5 per year, three issues. A good way to stay in touch with Poets in the Schools programs. Exercises and ideas by teacher-poets and some student work. Orders: Teachers and Writers Collaborative, 186 W. Fourth Street, New York, NY 10014.

The Turtle and the Teacher. Ed. and comp. Ruby Lee Norris. Richmond, Va.: Richmond Intercultural Center for the Humanities, 1972. $3.30. Poets talk with students and the students talk back—with poems. Distributed by NCTE.

Twenty-five Minnesota Poets. Ed. Seymour Yesner. Minneapolis: Nodin Press, 1974. $3. An anthology used in elementary and secondary classrooms. Photographs, drawings, statements by poets.

Wishes, Lies and Dreams—Teaching Children to Write Poetry. Kenneth Koch. New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1971. $2.45. Essential reading for all teachers in elementary or higher grades. Based upon the author's experience teaching at P.S. 61, New York City, with poems written by his students. A color film on this same topic is available rent-free from Association-Sterling Films, 866 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10022. Also, Koch's *Rose, Where Did You Get That Red? Teaching Great Poetry to Children.* New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1973. $2.45.

Anthologies of Contemporary Poetry

America a Prophecy: A New Reading of American Poetry from Pre-Columbian Times to the Present. Ed. George Quasha and Jerome Rothenberg. New York: Random House, 1973. $12.95. Also, Random House, Vintage Books, 1974. $3.95. New and experimental poets side by side with well-known poets from colonial times to now.

The American Poetry Anthology. Ed. Daniel Halpern. New York: Avon Books, 1975. $7.95. Seventy-six poets under forty years of age represented by from one to six poems.

The Black Poets. Ed. Dudley Randall. New York: Bantam Books, 1971. $1.95. Sections on folk poets, spirituals, Harlem Renaissance, and the Sixties, with lists of periodicals, records, tapes and films.

Contemporary American Poetry. Ed. A. Poulin, Jr. 2d ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1975. $6.50. Selections by 22 poets, with an essay on recent poetry, photographs, and informative biographical sketches.

Contemporary American Poetry. Ed. Donald Hall. Rev. ed. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972. $2.25. Thirty-nine poets whose books have appeared since 1946, each represented by several poems.

Contemporary American Poets: American Poetry Since 1940. Ed. Mark Strand. New York: New American Library, Meridian Books, 1969. $4.95. Ninety-two poets each represented by two or three poems. Excellent selections and brief biographies. Also available in a Mentor paperback, $1.50.

Grab Me a Bus. Comp. M. Joe Eaton and Malcolm Glass. New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1975. $.95. Poems by students, grades 7-12, which received awards, 1971-74.

A Little Treasury of Modern Poetry. Ed. Oscar Williams. 3d ed. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970. $10. Still one of the best anthologies, with generous selections, illustrations, and an appendix, "On Poets and Poetry."

The Me Nobody Knows. Ed. Stephen M. Joseph. New York: Avon Books, 1972. $.95. Children's voices from the ghetto.

Miracles: Poems by Children of the English Speaking World. Ed. Richard Lewis. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1966. $4.95.

Naked Poetry: Recent American Poetry in Open Forms. Ed. Stephen Berg and Robert Mezey. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1969. $3.50. Poetry selections and brief statements by 20 poets on their poetry, Kenneth Rexroth to Sylvia Plath.

New American Poetry, 1945-1960. Ed. Donald Allen. New York: Grove Press, 1960. $3.95. An important anthology that introduced the Black Mountain, Beat, and Projectivist poets (for example, Charles Olson, Denise Levertov, and John Weiners) to a wider audience.

New Voices in American Poetry. Ed. David Allen Evans. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers, 1973. $5.95. Forty-five young poets represented by several poems and a statement about the writing of one poem.

No More Masks! An Anthology of Poems by Women. Ed. Ellen Bass and Florence Howe. New York: Doubleday & Co., Anchor Books, 1973. $3.95. An excellent introduction to the experience of women in poetry, from Amy Lowell to Nikki Giovanni.

The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry. Ed. Richard Ellmann and Robert O'Clair. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1973. $14.95. Selections by numerous poets with brief biographies, an extensive bibliography and index.

The Penguin Book of Socialist Verse. Ed. Alan Bold. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1970. $1.95. Poets from around the world—Latin America, Russia, Africa, as well as England and the U.S.

Poems on Poetry: The Mirror's Garland. Ed. James G. Taaffe and Robert Wallace. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1965. $2.45. Poems about poetry and poets.

Poet's Choice. Ed. Paul Engle and Joseph Langland. New York: Dial Press, 1962. $7.50. Brief statements on poetics and a representative poem selected by numerous authors. Superbly edited.

Reflections on a Gift of Watermelon Pickle, and Other Modern Verse. Ed. Stephen Dunning, Edward Luedens, and Hugh Smith. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Co., 1967. $5.50. A popular and well-edited collection for classroom use. Another book along similar lines by the same editors, *Some Haystacks Don't Even Have Any Needle and Other Complete Modern Poems.* Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1969. $5.95.

The Voice That Is Great Within Us: American Poetry of the Twentieth Century. Ed. Hayden Carruth. New York: Bantam Books, 1970. $1.95. A low-priced but extensive collection of twentieth-century poets of the English language.

Winning Hearts and Minds. Ed. Larry Rottmann. New York: McGraw-Hill Co., 1972. $1.95. Young Vietnam veterans tell their story in verse.